

SENATE BILL 895

**TESTIMONY OF LT. PATRICK GAYNOR
MERIDEN POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**VICE PRESIDENT OF THE CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF POLICE UNIONS
AFSCME, COUNCIL 15**

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF
THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 895

FEBRUARY 15, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, my name is Lt. Patrick Gaynor, and I am a vice president with AFSCME Council 15, a labor union representing the interests of more than 4000 police officers in 62 municipal communities throughout Connecticut. I am employed as a lieutenant in the Meriden Police Department.

I am here today to speak IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 895 - AN ACT INCREASING THE PENALTY FOR ENGAGING A POLICE OFFICER IN VEHICULAR PURSUIT.

Council 15 is in favor of this bill because it will make our communities safer.

The bill proposes to increase the penalties for engaging a police officer in a vehicular pursuit. As we see it, passage of the bill will deter individuals from endangering their own lives and more importantly, the lives of innocent motorists and bystanders, and police officers by engaging police officers in foolish high-speed pursuits.

Currently, individuals who engage a police officer in a pursuit are charged with a Class A Misdemeanor. This bill would raise the charge to a Class D Felony, and thereby mandate a minimum one year prison sentence. It would also increase the potential fine to not more than \$5000 from a fine of not more than \$2000. Currently, as a Class A misdemeanor, no prison time is required as a penalty.

We believe that these increased penalties are necessary to deter individuals from putting so many lives at risk.

The statistics are startling and support this tougher measure.

On average:

- Police chases for non-violent crimes kill at least **3 innocent bystanders every week** in the United States.
- These crashes kill 1 officer about **every six weeks**.

According to the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin:

- **One person dies everyday** as a result of a police pursuit.
- Innocent third parties who just happened to be in the way constitute **42 percent** of persons killed or injured in police pursuits.
- Further, 1 out of every 100 pursuits results in a fatality.

In Addition

- “A traffic crash constitutes the most common terminating event in an urban pursuit.” □—**Ret. Police Chief D.P. Van Blaricom, Bellevue, WA**
- It is estimated there are about 70,000 chases each year in the United States. However, there is no national database to provide this information.

PursuitSAFETY.org – a national group started by the mother of a 15-year-old California girl who was killed by a fleeing motorist, supports legislation throughout the United States to stiffen standards for fleeing motorists. Their goals include sponsoring and supporting legislation that makes all acts of fleeing and eluding the police a felony with mandatory prison time.

As an organization, we at Council 15 support this pending legislation and also support

1. Mandatory officer training, preferably once a year but no less than every two years.
2. Policy testing to ensure that police officers understand and abide by their departments' pursuit policy in order to reduce the likelihood of severe or fatal injuries resulting from chases.

This bill is good for Connecticut and will help ensure that the senseless loss resultant from police chases will decrease and protect innocent people, the police, and even those who would be foolish enough to engage a police officer in a pursuit. The passage of this law, combined with a strong public message about the dangers of engaging in pursuit will go a long way toward making our communities safer.